

**Amendments to the Claims:**

The listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims**

1-11. (Cancelled).

12. (Currently amended) An expression cassette comprising:

a) a bacterial promoter,  $p_{zn}$ , comprising a binding site for the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein, which site comprises the following sequence:

AAAAATAANGTNNNNNNNTTGACATTATTTTT

(SEQ ID NO:1)

in which TTGACA is the -35 box of said promoter, and N represents A, C, G or T; and

b) a sequence encoding a polypeptide with at least ~~80%~~ 85% identity with ~~the~~ *a Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein encoded by nucleotide 357-794 of SEQ ID NO: 9, placed under the transcriptional control of said promoter; and wherein the polypeptide is obtained from *Lactococcus*; and which is operably linked to a restriction site.

~~e) — at least one restriction site allowing the insertion of a nucleotide sequence of interest under the transcriptional control of said promoter, and wherein the expression cassette does not comprise any part of the sequence encoding the L. lactis ZitS protein.~~

13. (Currently Amended) The expression cassette of claim 12, wherein the  $p_{zn}$  ZitR binding site comprises the following sequence:

AAAAATAANGTNNNNNNNTTGACATTATTTTNNNNNNNNNTATAT

(SEQ ID NO: 2)

14. (Currently Amended) The expression cassette of claim 13, wherein the p<sub>Zn</sub> promoter ZitR binding site comprises a sequence selected from the group consisting of:

AAAAATAACGTAACTGGTTGACATTATTTTCTTTGCTATATAATTAACCATA

(SEQ ID NO: 4); and

AAAAATAACGTAACTGGTTGACATTATTTTCTTTGCTATATAATTAACCAGTA

(SEQ ID NO: 5).

15. (Cancelled)

16. (Currently amended) The expression cassette of claim 12, further comprising a nucleotide sequence encoding an extracellular targeting peptide, operably linked to at least one restriction site for cloning of a nucleotide sequence as a translational fusion with said targeting peptide, wherein the targeting peptide and the at least one restriction site are under the transcriptional control of the p<sub>Zn</sub> promoter.

17. (Previously presented) The expression cassette of claim 16, wherein said extracellular targeting peptide is a signal peptide of sequence:

MKKINLALLTLATLMGVSSSTVVFA (SEQ ID NO: 6).

18. (Currently amended) The expression cassette of claim 12, further comprising a nucleotide sequence under the transcriptional control of the  $p_{Zn}$  promoter, wherein the expression cassette does not comprise any part of the sequence encoding the *L. lactis* ZitS protein, fused to a reporter gene.

19. (Currently Amended) A recombinant vector comprising the expression cassette as ~~claimed in Claim 12~~ of claim 12.

20. (Currently Amended) A gram-positive bacterium transformed with the expression cassette ~~as claimed in Claim 12~~ of claim 12.

21. (Previously Presented) The bacterium of Claim 20, which is a lactic acid bacterium.

22. (Withdrawn) A method of producing a protein in a gram-positive bacterium, which comprises culturing a gram-positive bacterium transformed with at least one expression cassette of Claim 12.

23. (Withdrawn) The method of Claim 22, wherein the gram-positive bacterium is a lactic acid bacteria.

24. (Withdrawn) The method of Claim 22, wherein the lactic acid bacteria is selected from the group consisting of lactococci, lactobacilli and streptococci.

25. (Withdrawn) A method of producing a protein in a gram-positive bacterium, which comprises the steps of:

a) introducing in said bacterium at least one expression cassette of Claim 12, comprising a sequence encoding said protein;

b) culturing said bacterium in a medium comprising an amount of  $Zn^{+2}$  that is sufficient to repress the expression of the protein:

c) inducing the production of said protein by  $Zn^{+2}$  depletion of said medium; and

d) recovering the protein produced.

26. (Withdrawn) The method of Claim 25, wherein the  $Zn^{+2}$  depletion of the medium is effected by adding a divalent cation-chelating compound to the medium.

27. (Withdrawn) The method of Claim 25, wherein the  $Zn^{+2}$  depletion of the medium is effected by culturing the bacterium until depletion of the  $Zn^{+2}$  occurs in the medium.

28. (Withdrawn) A method of controlling expression of a promoter of the ZitRSQP operon in a bacterium, which comprises varying concentration of  $Zn^{+2}$  in a medium containing the bacterium.

29. (Withdrawn) The method of Claim 28, wherein the increasing the  $Zn^{+2}$  concentration represses expression of the promoter.

30. (Withdrawn) The method of Claim 28, wherein decreasing the  $Zn^{+2}$  concentration promotes expression of the promoter.

31. (Cancelled)

32. (Currently amended) The expression cassette of claim ~~34~~ 12, wherein the sequence encoding the polypeptide has at least 95% identity with the *Lactococcus lactis* ZitR protein.

33. (Cancelled).

34. (Cancelled)

35. (Currently amended) The expression cassette of claim 12, wherein the sequence encoding the polypeptide of b ) has at least 85% identity with ~~GenBank AAK06214~~ the sequence deposited under accession number AAK06214.

36. (New) An expression cassette, comprising:

a) a bacterial promoter  $p_{zn}$  comprising a binding site for the *Lactococcus lactis*, ZitR protein, which site comprises the following sequence:

AAAAATAANGTNNNNNNNTTGACATTATTTTT

(SEQ ID NO.: 1)

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in which TTGACA is the -35 box of said promoter, and N represents A, C, G or T; and

b) at least one restriction site allowing the insertion of a nucleotide sequence under the transcriptional control of said promoter, and wherein the expression cassette does not comprise any part of the sequence encoding the *L. lactis* ZitS protein.